



From Blogs to Bombs: The Future of Digital Technologies in Education

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Mark Pegrum is an assistant professor in the Graduate School of Education at the University of Western Australia, where he teaches in the area of e-learning. His research focuses on the increasing integration of web 2.0 and mobile technologies in everyday life.

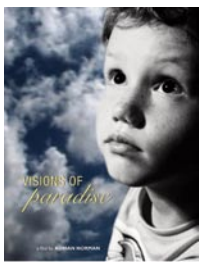
In this useful book, aimed at educators who may be struggling to understand what seems to come naturally to their students he asks:

“Does the internet enhance education or erode standards? Does it empower kids or endanger them? Does it mean more freedom or more surveillance?”

He goes on to say: “The short answer is: all of the above. Digital technologies – including computing and mobile technologies – are among the most widely discussed subjects of our time. Yet their effects on young people and their education, and on developments in wider society, are poorly understood.”

From *Blogs to Bombs* isn't an easy read, but there's a wealth of information for teachers determined to get on top of ICT. The eight-page index will help the reader to find succinct explanations of acronyms, buzzwords and the gurus that have created them.

Conclusion: Well worth having on your bookshelf.



Visions of Paradise

DVD

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Visions of Paradise is a new documentary that aims to educate young people about the nature of cults. The DVD opens with black and white footage of vulnerable looking children and a voice-over from a former cult member describing how he became involved with the group. The rest of the presentation is divided into five parts – *Cults and mind control; A type of paradise; Changing the belief system; Escaping a cult, and Dealing with cults* – which can be watched as separate episodes or in a single sitting.

The documentary intersperses interviews with five ex-cult members with commentary from experts including a mental health professional, clinical health psychologist and a Uniting Church Minister, who is also a cult expert. The honesty of the interviewees as they recount their personal experiences lends an authenticity and power to the presentation. For example, one woman describes how the cult gave her a sense of purpose and belonging to the point where she was willing to cut all ties with her family to remain a part of the group. Her apparent “normalcy” now is a testament to how anyone can fall prey to a cult under the right circumstances.

Where the DVD tends to fall down is in the use of images of a young woman in a variety of situations – reading books, at the shopping centre, on the computer – in an attempt to parallel the journey of a youth dabbling in cults with those of the former cult members. With no context surrounding this young woman, and an at times tenuous connection to the narrative, rather than helping viewers identify with what's going on, the device is simply confusing.

Having said that, *Visions of Paradise* presents some excellent information about what a cult is, and why people are susceptible to them. The section on the psychology of influence is particularly interesting as it could be related not just to cults, but to peer pressure and other issues that young people face as they strive to fit in. References to some of the better known cults, including Jonestown, the Branch Davidians, and even Hitler, demonstrate the danger that cults can represent.

The final part encourages viewers to critically evaluate any group that seems too good to be true, and to use available technology, such as internet searches, to thoroughly research such organisations before becoming involved.

Suitable for middle- to senior-secondary students, *Visions of Paradise* is a thought-provoking study of what are termed ‘quasi-religious’ organisations, and could be effectively incorporated into courses including Religion and Society or Psychology.

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